

Eötvös Loránd University  
Faculty of Humanities

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION THESES**

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**ADOLF PECHÁNY**

**AND THE SLOVAK – HUNGARIAN CO-EXISTENCE FROM 1880 TO 1942**

**Doctoral School of History  
Cultural History PhD. Programme**

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## **Research goal of the dissertation**

Through the life of a teacher of Slovak origin, dr. Adolf Pechány, who was born in 1859 in Illava, Trenčín County, we would like to present a system of views that was characteristic for more Slovak contemporaries of Pechány.

It is generally known that he set together the chapter introducing the Slovaks in the popularizing series of volumes titled *The Austro – Hungarian Monarchy in Writings and Pictures*; he wrote the history of the revolution 1848/49 in Slovak language; out of some pedagogic newspapers he also edited the governmental *Slovenské Noviny* (Slovak News) issued in Budapest. He supported the realization of Lex Apponyi and visited schools in the northern counties of the country. After a short period of stay at home following the state turnover he returned back to Hungary and from 1921 he worked here as „the Hungarian king’s representative of Slovaks living in Hungary”. He visited places settled by Slovaks and his reports and notices helped in establishing national kindergardens with Hungarian tuition language. He expected successful Magyarizing of Slovaks by these activities. He worked in the function of the ministerial representative till 1941, a year later, in 1942 he died in Budapest.

The aim of the research was to try to reconstruct the fact, how could Pechány, who was born into a Slovak family, become the concept supporter of the unified Hungarian political nation. How was he influenced, what experiences made him a supporter of the Magyarizing ambitions more and more active while ageing. In what measures may we agree with the critique on his address and being a come-outer as he was called by Slovaks. May we understand him and the motivation that influenced him in his decisions? In our opinion the picture may become more shadowy by learning more about some sources comparing it with the view of the historians who evaluated his personality - with some exceptions - in black or white only. In connection with this fact we found remarkable Pechány’s early discourses about the importance of the Hungarian language being a bond in a multinational homeland and mentioned it more times as a a common homeland. There are two narrations, two codes formed by the Hungarian and Slovak national history, but both of them simplify because they are based on national myths. None of them is enough to analyze such „temporary” individuals as Pechány was, they cannot be put into the above narratives. No research was made about them in the past, they were mentioned only in outlines. One of the aims of this dissertation may be the approach of both – the Hungarian and Slovak – historical narratives.

In this connection it would be also significant to discover the fact, what were the reasons for Pechány while agreeing with Magyarizing efforts and why did he see them as a benefit for

nations living in Hungary. Pechány's behavior comes from his Slovak origin: how far may he go in his hungarofilism that is not dangerous for Slovaks yet?

We also tried to answer the following question: may we say that Pechány was a late representative of the Hungarian identity or was he just a Magyarizing "come-outer" Slovak or can we make an approach to these two evaluations being far from each other?

The dissertation would like to present Pechány's way of describing Slovaks living in Hungary and his idea about the co-existence of various nations in Hungary. How did he experience the Trianon trauma and how did he answer the challenges of the state turnover. We were also interested in his contemporaries' evaluation of his person, what role did he play in the minority policy and in Hungarian image forming about Czechoslovakia. Did the Prime Minister's Office deal with his reports in details and did it have any consequences?

### **Research methods**

The presented dissertation is an experiment on the introduction of a human being and his life: from biographic point of view it is a history of a lifelong work. Through Pechány we would like to understand the system of ideas that was characteristic for a high percentage of the Slovak intelligence of that era. There is a need to understand the role of the soul in the life of an individual, in his decisions, motivations dealing with in our research. The individual is seen here as an organic part of the society whose personality is changing and also his identity is forming and developing.

Meanings of the terms change as well and it can be one of the reasons of argumentations between the narratives. The term of the nation is different and has another concept in Hungarian and is different in the Slovak explanation: it can be seen in terms "hazafi" (patriot) and "odrodilec" (come-outer) as well. We have to take into notice the historical events of that era and because of it the context renew is important. Methodical questions have arisen while writing Pechány's curriculum vitae: the speed of the research and the "broken and dynamic character of the identity and contrary moments of its formation." Is it possible to write one's life? Levi mentions some disformings while writing a CV and due to this fact "as historians we imagine historical performs obeying limited and anachronistic rationalism." According to him a CV may be relevant because we can present norms and their true activities through it in a way that life forming is shown not in the way of differences between the rules and practice

but also as the result of the disharmony between the norms. Here belong the individual's freedom and his contraries, too.<sup>1</sup>

Elementary schools did not issue reports but from the secondary school notices we could make research about Pechány's student life and later about his years as a teacher. From the materials of the National Archives of Hungary the documents of the Department of Minority Issues of the Prime Minister's Office gave us the possibility to study his years working as a Slovak representative and we have investigated the materials from the archives of the Ministry of Religion and Education. From the Nagybicse Archives we collected information about the Pechány family's background, from the official reports of Nitra County found in the Archives in Nyitraivánka we got informed about the mood of people living in Czechoslovakia in the period between the two world wars.

His notion of the nation, his mentality and identity can be understood especially from his studies written in Hungarian and Slovak language and from his numerous publicistic works. His papers and articles published in newspapers as Pozsonymegyei Közlöny, Felső-magyarországi Nemzetőr, Vágvölgyi Lap, Slovenské Noviny, Pozsonyvidéki Lapok, Napkelet, Nyitrai megyei Közlöny and others help us to follow Pechány's system of reasons and his mentality. While using them as sources we have taken into consideration László Vörös's statement who says that Hungarian newspapers published on the Upper Land as well as the governmental Slovenské Noviny both supported the model of the unified Hungarian political nation and they were the voice of the existing Hungarian identity of that era the – "uhorská identita".<sup>2</sup>

We aimed to map Pechány's contacts and his social net, to learn about his surroundings and intellectual influences (school, place of work, the city) on one hand and to learn about his answers given on experienced compulsions (the state turnover) on the other one.

### **Structure of the dissertation**

In the introduction part of the thesis we have made a draft of the dilemmas around Pechány's personality and his life as a source problem and we tried to understand it. Despite of his Slovak origin why did he support Magyarizing efforts and why did he believe that this process will be a benefit for the minorities living in Hungary? He never renounced his Slovak origin and supported the Slovak interests being not dangerous for Hungary's integrity. Meanwhile he

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<sup>1</sup> Levi, Giovannai: Az életrajz használatáról. In: Korall. Budapest, Új Mandátum, 2000/2. 81-92.

<sup>2</sup> Vörös László: Analytická historiografia versus národné dejiny. „Národ“ ako sociálna reprezentácia. Pisa, Plus, 2010. 151-154.

was building a nice career. At the beginning of the dissertation we have mentioned that the contemporary historians hardly can analyze such „temporary” individuals as Pechány was and due to this fact the thesis may bring new results if the two opposite historical narrations, simplifying codes may be brought closer to each other.

After the introduction part we were dealing with didactic principles of writing curriculum vitae, negative sides of the biographic approach and the possibilities of a successfully built up life. We have drawn attention to the role of the context, in this connection we mentioned the importance of the reconstruction of the era and while writing Pechány's CV we also have to take into consideration his dynamic and changing character on one hand and the appearance of the assimilation on the other one.

Afterwards CV writing started with the introduction of Pechány's homeland. We were interested in the fact who did assimilate in this region of the Upper Land and from local newspapers we tried to learn more about minority relations in Trencsén County. We have investigated his family background from existing sources and the school reports gave us information about the intellectual surrounding where he grew up as a student and was working as a teacher. We tried to understand what influenced the former student of the Slovak secondary grammar school in Zníóvárálja to turn against the Slovak national movement and why, who affected him to follow the way at the end of which he supported Magyarizing processes of the Slovak nation.

The history of hungarus belief as a system of views has been summarized according to research results of Móric Csáky. The patient, so-called hungarus behaviour has been compared with Pechány's early writings. Practice made questionable the credibility of the hungarus intellect coming from the above studies, e.g. the support of the realization of Lex Apponyi despite of the fact that the bound role of the Hungarian language and the necessity of the protection of the Slovak language he undoubtedly advocated both in the family and in the church.

Next chapters present Pechány's description of the Slovak nation: deep empathy and the will to rise the Slovak nation up. By passing years his idea was to do it through the process of their Magyarizing. He introduced family life, traditions and the homeland as well. This part is closely connected with the chapter that reminds in his travelogues the beauties of the Vág völgy, the region settled by the Slovaks.

To understand Pechány, it is important to analyze his pedagogic studies where he writes about the language, e.g. in his dissertation thesis. In other places he meditates about the role of the language in intellectual development of children, about methods of language learning,

afterwards about the Slovak nation's Magyarizing and in this connection he speaks about the possibilities of learning Hungarian more successfully. He was announcing the Slovak nation's integration to the Hungarian homeland – the biggest danger according to him was the Slovak national movement and marked it as Pan-Slavic. He was dealing with the history of this movement, too. We presented how did he analyze its formation and why did he think that it harms interests of the Slovaks.

Further on we presented Pechány being a ministerial representative and his contact with the Prime Minister's Office dealing with the nature of the visits and their consequences. Visits are mapped by counties, specially dealing with Békés, Pest and Nógrád Counties. Pechány used to be a copious writer before the World War I already. In his publications he stood by Hungary's integrity, the Hungarian patriotism and the importance of learning Hungarian. His journalist's activity has been fulfilled in the period when the Hungarian government having foreign political aims entrusted him to edit the re-opened Slovenské Noviny. We have brought to the attention the ideas of the Hungarian government about the role of the old-new media organ and its hopes connected with Pechány. In this connection – as a part of Pechány's rich publication activities – we read his papers and followed his way of thinking: what did he find important to inform his superordinates about. He controlled not only domestic newspapers and publications issued in Hungary, he was browsing Czechoslovak newspapers as well. He usually sent articles about the minority education in Hungary, about the efforts of the Slovak People's Party to form autonomy and about the Slovaks' disappointment. His informants' reports about the supposed wish of Slovaks living in Czechoslovakia that they want to return back to the Hungarian homeland he regularly sent them, too.

The final chapter of the dissertation presents some from the opinions and reviews written about Pechány. We divided them into two parts: those written before the state turnover and those arisen after the years 1918 – 1920. These opinions have been compared with his life followed by us and have made a summary whether it is possible to put them closer, to put the wide scale of reviews into a synthesis.

### **Hypotheses and results of the dissertation**

Pechány coming from Trencsén County settled mostly by Slovaks was sent to the secondary grammar school in Znióváralja, one of the institutions of education for the Slovak intelligence. We could not find out undoubtedly, why did his family send the young Pechány to this institution. Sources say, his Hungarian was poor but we can only guess that the family supported the Slovak national movement. It is also confirmed that after closing the Slovak

secondary school and followed his studies in Hungarian ones, he was diligent in learning Hungarian and got scholarship as well. We suppose that this supporting atmosphere, material motivation might have been a strong impulse for the young student and could have lead him to the belief that the Hungarian knowledge might be a benefit for him. The later university years in Budapest – where he gained doctoral degree – have strengthened his feeling further. The experience of the big city becoming strongly Hungarian, the Slovak intelligence living there becoming Hungarian as well and the experience of successful lives could have had big influence on Pechány's decisions. During his years of being a secondary school teacher he was in a group of people supporting Magyarizing and the Hungarian minority policy. Five years after his stay in Budapest he said vivat in an album of memories to Gusztáv Libertiny, who was the member of the FEMKE and the editor of *Felvidéki Nemzetőr* calling him as the leader of pedagogic sciences. Here can be clearly seen how did Pechány support the official Hungarian minority policy. He mentions among Libertiny's credits that "he makes the national type more important" as a teacher and his aim is to teach "educated patriots". Pechány also appreciates the fact that Libertiny's Hungarian exercise-book is already used in Slovak elementary schools as well. He agrees with Libertiny's idea that the overriding aim of the education is for people "to be first of all Hungarian citizens". We meet here for the first time Pechány's favourite idea about the bond role of the Hungarian language despite of the fact that Pechány quotes here Libertiny yet.<sup>3</sup> In the same year he moves away from the Slovak national movement calling it Pan-Slavic.<sup>4</sup> A little bit later he helped in the realization of Lex Apponyi and visited schools.

From 1921 as the ministerial representative of the Slovaks living in Hungary he supported the Magyarizing process. Instead of supporting co-existence of minorities and the variousness of languages he was announcing the Magyarizing process of the Slovaks. His views of the nation had weaker and weaker base and the notion of the unified political nation became outmoded. Even in 1920 he did not find a real answer. He processed the Trianon trauma in the way that the Slovak communities who did not want to give up their language he looked at as if they were a source of danger.

After Trianon the traditional minority policy became out-dated before the state turnover and due to this fact Pechány's policy became a fiasco. He was not able to renew after the turnover

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<sup>3</sup> Libertiny Gusztáv Nyitra megyei tanfelügyelőségének tizedik évfordulójára. Budapest, Heisler Nyomda, 1886. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Pechány Adolf: A panszlavizmus multja és jelene. In: *Felső-magyarországi Nemzetőr*, 1886/17-20. szám.

and remained in his own schemes. Neither his contemporaries nor him could overpass the fact that after ten years of the establishment of the state, Czechoslovakia educated its own clerks, built up its own infrastructure and seemed to be functioning.

Despite of it we do not look at Pechány through the glasses of simplifying historical narratives often based on myths. It is worth to investigate him only in the context of his era. He may not be evaluated neither as if he undoubtedly was the representative of the hungarus concept nor as if he had made black and white service for the Magyarizing policy. He can be characterized by both of them. In different periods of time he had different priorities. His identity cannot be characterized with constancy or perfect unsafeness. Influences of his surroundings and the changing era affected him and maybe the possibility of versatility motivated him as well. He was a temporary type of person whose life in his era was a real and chosen one.

At the beginning of our research we could have told that Pechány was a late representative of the hungarus view due to the fact that out of keeping Hungary's integrity he was announcing the bond role of the Hungarian language. He never renounced his Slovak origin and was always empathetic towards the Slovaks. It seemed he did not want to spread Hungarian language contrary to the Slovak one. With some conditions but it can be accepted until the state turnover. Afterwards he expressly took part in Magyarizing of Slovaks living in Hungary, even by pushing back the Slovak language. Because of this fact he supported the establishment of national kindergardens and due to this he made proposals for liquidation of self-confident Slovak deeds rightfully adhering to their language.